



Leaving NIMBYs behind – Uncertainty within space-related conflicts over offshore wind farms in Scotland and Germany

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Title: Leaving NIMBYs behind – Uncertainty within space-related conflicts over offshore wind farms in Scotland and Germany

Abstract:

Offshore wind farms are widely considered to become a cornerstone of energy transition for securing the energy supply and tackling climate change simultaneously. But recent developments have demonstrated that offshore wind farms are far from being conflict-free, evoking confrontations with other stakeholder interests. Drawing on comparative case studies in Scotland and Germany, this paper addresses and explores various conflict lines emerging from the installation of offshore wind farms and contesting local community interests and concerns. Local resistance against wind farms opens up a vast debate about the constitutive origins of the opposition which have previously been framed by NIMBY portrayals that are now rather denounced as being too simplistic, uneducated and parochial. Such considerations may point towards the appearance of locally rooted oppositions but do not provide profound explanations due to obscuring underlying rationales.

By going beyond the stigmatisation of NIMBYism, the notion of space-related conflicts is intended to turn the attention towards conflicting interests and values that are aimed at space. This does not imply that such interests can be simply located at a certain 'space', but that these interests rather involve a spatial dimension in terms of representations and appropriations of spatiality.

Conflicts over the development of renewable energy facilities manifest through practices stressing socio-economic and environmental impacts that are supposed to be disruptive to people and to what is regarded as 'nature'. However, it is argued that these refer to uncertainties and claimed truths that are under negotiation during the planning and licensing processes. Hence, this notion rather points to discursive representations and assumptions of potential impacts which are supposed to be particularly informed by strategic spatial constructions in the sense of 'geography-making'.

While mostly reproducing discourses that are likewise applicable to and may coincide with those stemming from controversies over onshore wind farms, local opponents to offshore wind farms draw on specific narratives in order to justify and legitimate their stances. This paper explores the story lines local actors (re-)produce to cope with and overcome various conflict situations. In doing so, a framework reflecting on structural, subjective and spatial components of conflicts is suggested to illuminate the rationales hiding behind an alleged NIMBYism. It will be shown that oppositional story lines are, to a certain extent, related to uncertainties, risks and insecurities evolving from planning and participation structures and societal negotiation processes of spatial and economic impacts.